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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes past studies of outdoor recreational behavior from the point of view of symbolic interactionism. This perspective focuses directly on the manner in which individuals interpret the words and behavior of others, as well as their own physical environment. The first part of the analysis examines some recent definitions of recreation and data on outdoor recreation. The second part is devoted to a social-psychological scrutiny of this form of human action. Specific attention is given to demonstrating the usefulness of symbolic interactionism as a way to regard outdoor recreational behavior as a learned and symbolically transmitted social action. (Author/BRB/CL)

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OUTDOOR RECREATION BEHAVIOR AS VIEWED FROM A SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM PERSPECTIVE

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Outdoor recreation use is increasing each year, and predictions suggest that this increase will continue in the future. Empirical studies of recreationists have been made, but adequate theoretical explanations of their behavior and the learning of this behavior are lacking.

It is the purpose of this paper to interpret and analyze parts of these past studies of outdoor recreational behavior from the perspective offered by symbolic interactionism. This perspective allows one to focus directly upon the manner in which individuals interpret the behavior and words of others, as well as their own physical environment. The first part of this analysis examines some recent findings on outdoor recreation and definitions of recreation, and the second part of the paper is devoted to a social psychological scrutiny of this form of human action. Specific attention is given in this latter section to demonstrating the utility of symbolic interactionism in regarding outdoor recreational behavior as a form of learned and symbolically transmitted social action (Morrione, 1971).

Clawson and Knetch's (1966: 6) definition of outdoor recreation is representative of the majority of attempts to delineate the area. According to them "Outdoor recreation is simply recreation that is typically carried on outdoors," and recreation means "activity (or planned inactivity) undertaken because one waits to do it." In many cases a rigorous taxonomic approach is not possible, since the same activity may fall into different categories depending on the circumstances or situation. "The distinguishing characteristic of recreation is not the activity itself but the attitude with which it is undertaken" (Clawson and Knetch, 1966: 6). Thus, the meaning that an individual places on a particular activity determines whether or not it is recreation. The same activity or behavior may be classified differently by an individual according to the circumstances or situation (Parsons, 1966).

In 1962, the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC, 1962) delineated a variety of activities accepted as outdoor recreation and leisure time pursuits by Americans.

These include:

Driving for pleasure
Walking for pleasure
Playing outdoor sports or games
Swimming
Sightseeing
Bicycling
Fishing
Attending sports events
Picnicking
Nature walks
Boating (not canoe or sail)
Hunting
Horseback riding
Camping
Ice skating
Sledding or tobogganing
Hiking
Water skiing
Attending outdoor drama, concerts
Canoeing
Sailing
Mountain climbing
Snowskiing

However, the meanings placed on each recreational activity may vary between individuals or groups of participants. During a recent study of deer hunters Kennedy (1970) examined attitudes and values related to hunting trips of (1) forestry and wildlife students at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VII and SU), (2) custodians at the same university, and (3) hunters on the Pocomoke State Forest, Maryland. He found that the meaning or definition for a particular activity can vary between different participants and groups. For example, some hunters liked to hunt alone and were even annoyed by the presence of other hunters. Others liked company, and for some of them just being with their companions was even more enjoyable than actually hunting.

Individuals can have differences in participant role definitions related to outdoor recreation even though they may participate in the same or similar recreation activities. In Kennedy's (1970) study the variety of answers given by the members of different groups could very well be affected by variations in the respondents' concepts of the role of "hunter" and differences in role meaning and activity interpretation. For example, some were more disappointed than

others if they did not kill a deer. While the varying definitions of the role of "hunter" do not account for all attitudinal differences, they must be considered in order to obtain a more complete picture of the nature of this behavior.

Other research evidence indicates that at least parts of the normative behavior patterns and definitions used by participants in recreation activities differ from those used in other situations. Hendee and Campbell (1969: 14) found that

> . . . one of the unique features of the modern campground is that the norms and customs governing the acquaintance process are very different than other public places. One is expected to speak to his neighbor, and people seem to be defined as initially friendly rather than hostile or indifferent.

They concluded that for many people camping is a social experience which includes visiting and associating with newly met fellow campers.

In another study Campbell, Hendee, and Clark (1968) interviewed the victims of theft in campgrounds. They found that none of the victims "were really angry about their loss" and "continued to view the campground as a relatively crime-free community and were not at all willing to redefine it" (Campbell, Hendee, and Clark, 1968: 5). Campground authorities were not blamed for the loss, and the victims did not believe that their lost property could be retrieved. Many reported their loss only to legitimize their insurance claims, and others only casually mentioned their loss while conversing with authorities for other reasons. Some victims reported their losses only after hearing about similar robberies. These reactions would not have been typical in some other socio-spatial locations.

Thus, this and other research findings suggest that participants in outdoor recreation activities have normative behavior and definitions which are used in recreational situations. The activities and the associated environment

are subject to definition, and participants seem to act or behave on the basis of the evolved meanings which they have for various recreational activities and situations.

Meanings are created in the process of social interaction which begins at birth and continues throughout life. Researchers studying outdoor recreation have found that meanings, forming the basis for consequent behavior, may be derived early in life. Burch and Wenger (1967) found that childhood experiences affected camping style. In discussing the characteristics of their respondents, they found that camping patterns used or not used during childhood were related to camping behavior as adults. Hendee, Catton, Marlow, and Brockman (1968) found that wilderness values were also influenced by early experiences.

In another study of many different recreation activities a relationship was found between activities liked by fathers and sons (Scott, 1957). Bartholomew (1953: 188) cautiously wrote "Home and family recreation seemed to have a slight tendency to be associated with recreational interests." Concerning this study, Catton (1969: 2) later concluded, "Thus we may infer that recreational values may be learned in childhood, often in a family."

The family is the first primary group with whom an individual interacts, thereby deriving his first definitions and meanings through socialization by family members. They contribute to the child's development of favorable or unfavorable meanings and definitions as well as helping to teach needed techniques, skills, attitudes, motives, rationalizations and other factors which influence recreation.

"Others" outside the family, especially in primary groups, also interact with the individual and provide meanings which influence recreation behavior. Favorable definitions of certain activities will certainly help increase additional learning.

Kennedy (1970) mentioned earlier, found that a major portion of the students and all of the custodians came from a rural background, and 54 percent of the students and 40 percent of the custodians had been taught to hunt deer by their immediate family. In contrast the Pocomoke hunters were generally urbanites from the Baltimore area and had been introduced to hunting by friend(s) or neighbor(s).

In the case of the Pocomoke hunters an additional factor should be mentioned. An individual needs to have both the available opportunity[1] to learn the behavior and associated meanings, values, and skills, and must be where he can use what he has learned if the behavior is to become overtly manifest. The Pocomoke deer hunters exemplify this point. It appears that they did not hunt until available opportunity existed to learn about hunting and to participate in the activity, i.e., until they could find meaning through action and interaction for new symbols to which they were exposed.

Hendee, Catton, Marlow, and Brockman (1968) found that many wilderness users had other wilderness users as close friends. According to the tenets of social psychological exchange theory (Homans, 1958), this selection of friends could well be related to having similar interests and values in the first place as well as developing common meanings and symbols over time and extended interaction.

Through interaction with these friends wilderness meanings and normative behavior patterns could be reinforced for continued wilderness use and support. These researchers also found that some wilderness users belong to conservation organizations or outdoor clubs. These organizations and their members can be reference groups and act as important or "significant others" who influence the meanings held by the wilderness users and consequently affect their behavior.

Points discussed thus far in this paper will now be summarized. First, the meaning or definition that an individual places on an activity determines whether or not it is recreation. Second, the same activity may be classified differently according to the situation, and the interpretations and meanings that the recreators lend to them. The normative behavior patterns of individuals in a recreational situation seem to differ from their behavior patterns in other situations. Also, different recreationists can have different meanings and role definitions for the same activity. Third, individuals behave on the basis of the meanings or definitions which they have for various activities and situations; and fourth, meanings are derived during socialization which occurs through the process of interaction with others. However, an individual does not become completely "molded" through this process (Wrong, 1961). Learning occurs in families, with friends, and "others" with whom one associates.[2] Some of these "others" become "significant others" and can be "reference groups" to the recreationist.

DISCUSSION

In the remaining portion of this paper symbolic interactionism, an existing social-psychological perspective, will be used to tie together the preceeding ideas on outdoor recreation. There is no single orthodoxy which is symbolic interactionism, but agreement does exist on many important points. Ideas from symbolic interactionism have long been used by sociologists and social psychologists. Stryker (1967: 371) pointed out that "many social psychologists have made at least some of the ideas of symbolic interaction part of their theoretical equipment, whether or not they are aware of their debt."

Symbolic interactionism has prime value in the study of socialization. The theory is also of value in examining personality and the organization of persistent behavior patterns (Stryker, 1967). This is of particular importance

in relation to the learning of recreation behavior since Moss and Lamphear (1970) found some relationship between certain outdoor recreation activities and selected personality characteristics. (See also: Moss, Shackelford, and Stokes, 1969)

Symbolic interactionism is based on the premise that human society is characterized by the use of symbols and meanings, and that the meanings of various social and non-social objects or symbols is derived through the interaction process. "From their standpoint the environment consists only of the objects that the given human beings recognize and know" (Blumer, 1969: 11).

Blumer (1969: 2-4) gave three basic premises of symbolic interactionism. First "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them." Second, ". . . the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows . . . . The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing." And finally, ". . . these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters."

The value of this perspective can be seen in its ability to organize and codify the finding of researchers studying outdoor recreation use. The meaning and definitional nature of recreation, as pointed out earlier, can easily fit the symbolic interactionism paradigm. The learning of the meaning of recreational activities and situations from the "others" with whom one associates such as family, friends, or other associates is encompassed by the tenets of this theoretical perspective. Yet individual differences in recreational meanings and behavior are explained by the individual interpretation used in dealing with the things encountered. A person recreating alone can place meaning on the things which he encounters through this interpretive evaluation process.

In the hope that the link between symbolic interactionism and recreational behavior will be strengthened some further elaboration will now be made on the symbolic interaction model to provide a broader understanding of this perspective. Human beings respond to the environment as it is mediated through symbols or to the symbolic environment and not necessarily to the physical and biological environment itself. Persons entering a situation must interpret symbols and define the situation before acting. "The products of this defining behavior are termed 'definitions of situation.'" (Stryker, 1967: 375)

"A symbol is anything to which meaning is attributed. . . ." (Vernon, I - SYMBOLS - A - S 1971: 3). Symbols may refer either to something empirical or to something non-empirical or abstract, such as concepts. "Behavior of the individual is in response to symbols and is relative to the audience(s) and to the situation." (Vernon, 1971: 2) The term "audience(s)" refers to the "others" that may influence one's action or behavior, and "situation" refers to the context or environment in which the action or behavior occurs (Vernon, 1971).

Research mentioned earlier in this paper suggested that recreationist behavior is related to the definition or meaning of the outdoor situation. Examples were given in discussing the differences in the acquaintanceship process at a campground and the continued definition by recreationists of a campground as a "relatively crime free community" even after being robbed.[3] Symbols and situations such as campgrounds can be classified and categorized to allow generalized response to them. Through the use of categories man is not forced to respond to each object as unique since categories themselves act as symbols (Stryker, 1967).

The term "role" is used in regard to the socially defined expectations of behavior of an individual in a particular position. Further meaning is added to roles and positions through the shared defining of their interrelation-

ships. "Positions are socially recognized categories of actors. . . which can serve to organize behavior in relation to persons so categorized" (Stryker, 1967: 375-75).

Since an individual classified objects, symbols, and roles in the external world, he may become an object of his own actions. He may apply certain categories to himself and respond to himself by self naming, defining, and classifying (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1967; Mead, 1934). Through this process an individual may thus categorize himself and designate roles that he may play.

The use of roles by outdoor recreation participants such as hunters was mentioned earlier in this paper. Role interpretation can influence the individual in his recreational activities. The anticipation of the responses of others or the audience with whom one interacts or participates is called role-taking and can greatly influence behavior. For example, a high school student with his friends in a campground can behave very differently from times when he is in the same campground with his parents. (See Turner, 1962 for more discussion on role-taking process.)

The definition and importance placed on others as a real or perceived audience can be related to concepts such as reference groups and significant others, which indicate that not all persons with whom an individual interacts have identical perspectives and that more weight must be given to the perspectives of certain "others" (Stryker, 1967; Shibutani, 1967; Marton, 1968). Outdoor recreationists like the wilderness users cited earlier have their own reference groups, and hence this concept related to the symbolic interactionism perspective is useful when looking at recreational behavior. Environmental and behavioral meanings may be derived through interaction with this group.

CONCLUSIONS

More details could be added to the explanation of symbolic interactionism. Hopefully, however, its usefulness to those studying recreation behavior can now be seen through the examination of the previously cited examples where the findings of recent studies have been interpreted from this perspective. Not only is a framework provided for examining the processes of learning and interpreting meaning related to outdoor recreation use and associated normative behavior, but also one is provided for examining other related concepts such as "others," "generalized others," "significant others," "reference groups," "definition of situation," and recreationist "roles."

In conclusion it is proposed that researchers doing studies and analyses of recreation behavior or related areas consider the use of this already existing perspective. Its increased use could provide better understanding of recreation and leisure time pursuits.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin have discussed opportunity in their writings on criminology and delinquency. They (1970) indicate in discussing "differential opportunity" that they are using the term "opportunity" to imply access to both the learning and performance structure. It is believed that the concept of "differential opportunity" or available opportunity may be applied to the learning of and the participation in outdoor recreation behavior. This factor is only mentioned in passing, since it is not the prime object of this paper to discuss this facet of recreation behavior.

[2] Edwin H. Sutherland developed a theory of "Differential Association" related to the learning of criminal behavior. This theory is believed to have applicability to the learning of outdoor recreation behavior. Differential association (Sutherland 1970) is based on social interaction and deals with the "others" with whom the individual interacts in arriving at definitions and meanings. Behavioral responses are learned principally in intimate personal groups through the process of interaction and communication. Learning can include definitions of objects, motives, drives, attitudes, rationalizations, and techniques. The interaction with others may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity. It is believed that the similarity between criminal and recreational behavior lies in the fact that both types of activity require normative behavior patterns that are different, even if often ever so slightly with some recreation, from the day to day normative behavior patterns existing in much of society. This variation requires additional learning and definition by interaction with others. Hence, similar theories of behavior learning may be used.

[3] Although this suggests a normative model for situational determinants of action, one should also consider Thomas P. Wilson's (1970) discussion of the interpretive paradigm in making a sociological explanation of recreation behavior and associated social interaction.

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